



Formative Parenting

Cultivating Character in Children

A Ministry of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Immaculata, Pennsylvania

Parent Guide for Fostering School Success – Part 4 AUTONOMY PRACTICES

Dear Parent,

Success essentials for adult life as well as for school achievement include self-control or self-discipline, decision-making skills, assertiveness without aggressiveness and having the ability to act appropriately within a given circumstance. Such descriptors are characteristic of autonomy, one of the four elements of identity formation. Autonomy, nicknamed the “terrible twos” during the time of initial development, needs continual development and reinforcement. As parent, you contribute to the formation of autonomy within your child by modeling the characteristics mentioned, by directly teaching your child a process for making responsible decisions, and by giving your child consistent practice in knowing limits, making choices, and living with the consequences of the choices made. An autonomous child replaces early childhood rules with a code of conduct or standards that she applies to circumstances, without the need of adult supervision. She develops a positive sense of self-awareness and it becomes her inner authority.

AUTONOMY, or the sense of healthful independence, inner authority, self-reliance, and the capability of making appropriate decisions without supervision, is essential to identity formation and school success. To the extent that a child’s independent efforts result more often in positive experiences than in experiences of shame or doubt, **SELF-CONTROL** develops as his basic life strength and **WILL POWER** blooms as a basic life virtue in him. When a child experiences with consistency that his efforts are acknowledged more than the result of his effort, he is more likely to grow in a sense of autonomy.

You can empower your child to grow in autonomy by teaching her a four step process for making responsible decisions that is applicable to all issues and situations. Teach her (1) to think before she makes a choice; (2) to become conscious of the choice possibilities available to her; (3) to consider the consequences of her action; and (4) to consider the family and religious values which shape her personal code of conduct. Parents and teachers contribute to the development of positive self-esteem when they provide practices that help a child to become responsibly independent, self-governing, self-controlled, respectfully assertive, and accountable for the logical consequences of choices. Do not do for a child a task that she is capable of doing independently. That practice undermines autonomy.

Following are parent-suggested practices that develop a child’s sense of **AUTONOMY at School**. Consider which practices describe your home environment *as a pattern under usual, repeated circumstances*. May the results speak words of wisdom for you, affirm your parenting style, and serve as a guide to determine how to best provide for the ongoing identity formation and self-esteem development of your child.

Practices that Develop a Child's Sense of AUTONOMY AT SCHOOL

The most common parent suggestions, offered by 93 parents of "successful" children include but are not limited to the following parenting practices, listed alphabetically:

ACCEPT INDIVIDUALITY: As far as possible accept, without judgment, signs of independence from your child, such as: hairstyle, clothing, and music.

BUILD CONFIDENCE: Help your child aim for success in his school endeavors by role-playing areas of concern such as giving an oral report, talking to teachers about a grade, or working out a difference with a classmate. Then, have your child handle the problem on his own.

CREATE TRUST: Tell your child that he earns your trust by his actions.

DEVELOP LEADERSHIP: Encourage your child to attempt leadership roles, such as running for election in student government, auditioning for solo performances, or first-chair in the band, etc. Stress that participation is the key to successful leadership.

ENCOURAGE SELF-GOVERNANCE: Teach autonomous, responsible behavior to your child by allowing her to pack her own lunch, choose her clothes and prepare her books and assignments, complete her homework and ask for required signatures and permission slips, etc. Allow her to accept the consequences of forgotten papers and lunches, rather than making excuses for her. If she makes mistakes, ask her to name ways in which her performance can be improved in the future. Avoid writing notes and making excuses for missed assignments and poor behavior.

EXPECT RESPONSIBLE INDEPENDENCE: Provide an atmosphere and location where homework can be completed. Stress a regular schedule and assisting if needed, but let him choose his topics, projects, and methods, even if they differ from yours. Provide supplies that will be needed to complete the project. Involve him in the process of identifying and gathering supply needs. Let him learn the consequence of incomplete assignments or poor study habits.

GIVE FREEDOM FOR FAILURE: Expect your child to be responsible for her own actions and failures. Give your child the freedom to make mistakes. Follow failure with mutual discussion of alternative methods and solutions for the next time she must cope with the issue. Allow her to take full credit for her successes. Give positive feedback and specific praise as often as possible, especially when she works independently and demonstrates self-reliance.

PLAN FOR SUCCESS: Provide your child with the proper tools and supplies needed to be successful in school each

day, and remember to check throughout the school year to see if supplies need to be replenished. Be aware of programs offered by the school and remind your child of their dates and requirements.

PRE-DETERMINE POLICY: Discuss expectations and school rules with your child. Establish and communicate appropriate logical, reasonable consequences for incompleteness or disobedience. Be consistent in enforcing the consequences for poor choices.

PROVIDE BROAD EXPOSURE: Provide the opportunity for your child to broaden his horizons by participating in varied activities, modeling the joy of reading, and taking family field trips. Allow your child to choose his extra activities such as sports, safety patrol, music, or art. Hold him responsible to attend practices, performances, training, or games.

TEACH DECISION-MAKING PROCESS SKILLS: Model decision making process skills by discussing situations from your life. Involve your child in the process of identifying possibilities or approaches to a situation, recognizing the positive and negative consequences of each possibility, and suggesting the most appropriate solution. Listen to your child's ideas and offer alternative considerations.

TEACH FRIENDSHIP ATTITUDES: Teach your child to treat her friends with respect and compassion, being careful not to hurt feelings by talking about events in front of children who were not included in the event. Stress to your child the importance of loyalty to and acceptance of friends. Point out that everyone has personal skills and can make a contribution toward an overall goal.

TEACH RESPECTFUL ASSERTIVENESS: If your child is having problems at school and feels she is being treated unfairly, teach her how to present her concerns to the teacher or principal in a respectful, non-violent manner. Encourage her to use these skills to resolve conflicts with classmates also. Encourage your child to talk to his coach or teacher about physical limitations, absences, or practice problems. By Junior High, do not talk to his coach or teacher for him.

VALUE SELF-AWARENESS: Encourage your child to be himself and to believe in himself, his own ideas, his personal code of conduct, and his value system. Teach him to choose friends who allow him to be an individual.

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